

DCOHC INTERVIEW INDEX

The Davis Center Oral History Project

Narrator Full Name: **BEATRICE DAVIS-WILLIAMS**

Date of Interview: **SEPTEMBER 5, 2019**

Location of Interview: **3903 20th STREET NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20018**

Interviewer Name: **KAMILAH THURMON**

Biographical Information: Beatrice Davis-Williams is the founder and Artistic Director of The Davis Center.

Description: In this interview, Beatrice Davis-Williams discusses her upbringing in Philadelphia, her early influencers in dance, being a student at Howard University in the 1960s, and being the only African-American to achieve the highest level in the Cecchetti method. She recounts establishing the Davis Center, ballet Instruction for her students, loving her students, the trials and triumphs of having a small business in the District, and having a business on Georgia Avenue in early 90s. Davis-Williams also talks about her 50-year legacy and service to the DC community, how she wants to be remembered, and her Woodridge neighborhood.

Index

Time Codes	Short Description
0:00-3:40	Interview introductions; she was born in Washington, DC NE; describes her upbringing as “fun”; she was the middle child of three and her family lived close; parents taught children to be responsible
3:40-5:50	Describes neighborhood growing up as “residential” and “safe”; lived three blocks from East Capitol Street on the corner of Brooks and Division
5:50-7:28	Family left Washington, DC for the suburbs of Philadelphia; her father thought the DC neighborhood was changing and this motivated the move; there were very few African Americans in new neighborhood
7:28-11:30	Describes her father; learned a lot from her mother—sewing and knitting; “standards at home were high”; her parents were consistent and attributes her success to them

11:30-13:47	Describes life in Philadelphia as a child and teenager; tells the schools she attended—" I went to Myers, from second grade to fourth grade. In fifth grade, I went to Linwood Elementary. I went to Elkins Park Junior High and Cheltenham High School."
13:47-16:20	Talks about being a Girl Scout; her mother said she couldn't be a part of the organization but she really wanted to be in the group so her father made arrangements to make it happen for her
16:20-19:07	Felt protected as a child—"my father would go out front"; remembers a story of a teacher giving her a bad grade (because of racism) and her father talking to the teacher
19:07-23:15	Describes herself as a child; very curious and independent; "I was a daddy's girl"; if you met the standards of the household than you were supported
23:15-25:40	Started dancing when she was five with Doris Patterson on Minnesota Avenue; remembers a story of her dancing on the table and breaking the table
25:40-30:00	Explains her dance teachings in Philadelphia; studied dance under Sydney King, Mary Cuyjet and Essie Marie Dorsey—" They were the elite Black dance teachers at that time"; by her senior year of high school she was serious about dance but her father wanted her to go to college and get a degree; felt like she could do anything after being in several organizations—majorette, swim club, basketball, rifle club
30:00-36:33	Talks highly of her parents—"they always spent time with us"; talks about her experience joining the rifle club
36:33-39:07	Went to Howard and majored in Chemistry but continued to dance; but during her senior year she studied dance under Peters-Wright School of Dance, Sheila Peters and Barbara Wright; then the ladies' left the business and Ms. Davis-Williams took over
39:07-47:25	Biggest influential dance teacher was Marion Cuyjet; in addition to her parents (influencers) who had her involved in many activities; remembers how much her father was invested in her life and her brothers
47:25-52:32	At Howard University, she spent most of her time with family since her aunts and grandparents were in the area; she was especially close with her godmother/aunt
52:32-58:51	She left Howard, joined Job Corps, and started to teach as a dance teacher in Pennsylvania; recalls her time in camp as a child and reminisces again about her childhood and her parents—" I wasn't raised in the community."
58:51-1:04:42	Talks of her exposure for herself and other children; reminisces about her high school 25 and 50 year reunion
1:04:42-1:05:24	Explains why she majored in chemistry
1:05:24-	Describes more dance training she did in Washington, DC before

1:07:06	she started the studio
1:07:06-1:10:19	Her father was in a bad car accident and she started to fail out of Howard University; she received her graduate degree from UDC; and then received an offer to teach at Howard University—while this was all happening she had her studio but wasn't dancing at a permanent location
1:10:19-1:16:20	Tells of her interest and start with learning the Cecchetti method; first Black to learn the method and probably the only black to go as far in the method-- to grade six level, the teaching level; she started to have issues with her body during her intense Cecchetti training; recalls taking a test for Cecchetti method
1:16:20-1:20:46	Explains the Cecchetti method; and how the students test within the method, and who Cecchetti was
1:20:46-1:25:10	Explains her schooling—went to Howard, didn't finish at Howard, went to Job Corps, then received her degree from Federal City/UDC; received her Master's from Howard
1:25:10-1:34:15	Describes her work experience at Oak Hill Youth Center; she worked as a dance therapist; had a bad experience with a student threatening to kill her and another situation where a student set the stage on fire; "I ain't had no more jobs since then, just The Davis Center."
PART 2	
0:00-3:27	Interview introductions; motivations to truly start her own dance studio
3:27-5:50	Prepping for the Davis Center grand opening; she was super excited about her dance studio—"I got a studio!"
5:50-8:35	Describes the neighborhood, "Georgia Avenue is very transit." Explains how she had to establish herself in the neighborhood where her studio was—"there was less respect then than there is now. I don't know that it is much better for women, for black women, and for the arts."
8:35-9:43	Challenges while running her business
9:43-12:28	Explains why she left the Georgia Avenue location; "I left Georgia Avenue, it was deplorable. Mice falling out the ceiling, urine coming through the ceiling."
12:28-20:04	At Georgia Avenue location for 34 years, 6133 Georgia Avenue; discusses her popularity in DC but once she left Georgia Avenue location she lost students—very difficult time for her; explains how she found the Takoma location
20:04-23:05	Thought there was a possibility that the Obama sisters would attend The Davis Center; currently located at 6218 Third Street NW
23:05-26:34	Speaks on the challenges of upholding a standard at her studio
26:34-30:50	Describes the Davis Center philosophy; she's building confidence within her students

30:50-34:03	Remembers her time in Africa with her students; went to Senegal and Gambia
34:03-37:20	Gets emotional thinking about how much she cares for her students
37:20-39:03	Describes the parent community at her studio; difficulties of communicated with parents
39:03-44:14	Remembers the Davis Center performances
44:14-47:15	Explains why she started the etiquette classes, and events like Dance with My Father and the Mother's Day tea; recalls the programs and activities she's developed for her students
47:15-49:40	Explains why she started her non-profit arm, Arts for Our Children
49:40-54:38	The Davis Center has performed within the District; nursing homes, Georgia Avenue parade, and other places within the community—" I think they see a quality of ballet that they can't afford to go to"; her students have danced at the Kennedy Center, Stuttgart ballet, Berlin ballet, Royal ballet, Ballet West, Joffrey ballet, Nutcracker; "I'm using dance as a tool to help them to grow and be awesome human beings."
54:38-58:48	Definition of service; she tries her best to encourage her students; one student told her—"I want to be a dancer teacher like you"; in the end Ms. Davis is passionate about her job, "I love what I do."
58:48-1:02:58	Defines a Davis Center student—" The Davis Center student is a growing person. Davis Center student is a student who's open to learning and developing their self-confidence"; her goal is to be there for her students—she's been to graduations for her students, "I'm going to show up for my kids. They can depend on Davis."
1:02:58-1:05:14	Remembers her time in Africa with her students; her students did a wonderful performance
1:05:14-1:07:00	Recalls funny moments with her students
1:07:00-1:10:55	Proud of her students, "A couple of them opened their own studios. Several have got degrees in dance. I have one up in New York now"; she tries her best to encourage her students—" It's the Davis Center family. They're my girls. They think I'm crazy and I probably am, but they know I'm here for them"
1:10:55-1:12:58	Defines her teaching style, "I used to be really brutal"; Remembers a funny story from student
1:12:58-1:15:05	"The Davis Center is my life... Maybe not the Davis Center, but the children"; explains that the Davis Center's impact on the Washington, DC community
1:15:05-1:20:45	Describes what 50 years in service means to her; admits that she wouldn't be able to do her job unless she had the help from parents, her friends, her family, and God—"Thank you for sharing your child with me"
PART 3	

0:00-4:41	Interview introductions; awards received—Living Legend award was the most memorable award; Whitney Young award with Urban League; “all of them mean the same thing, that the job's getting done and they appreciate my efforts”
4:41-7:20	She thinks of special awards for her students
7:20-10:19	The future for The Davis Center; believes she’s improving in her craft
10:19-11:49	Believes The Lion King was her best performance
11:49-15:26	Currently lives in Woodridge neighborhood in Washington, DC; loves her neighborhood, would like “more camaraderie” in her neighborhood
15:26-17:19	Parents were her biggest influence and her students
17:19-19:30	Life lesson that she wants people to learn from her life—“you have to listen”
19:30-21:55	“Wish I had known what I was doing”; the advice should would give her younger self; there were so many things she wished she knew to make her business run smoothly; recalls a situation where a government rep did not provide information to her
21:55-24:27	Through dance you learn body language, control, teaches you how to be with people and respect them, and “evolve in your teaching skills”
24:27-25:30	Wants to be remembered as someone who cares; “and that you understand that I used my passion to dance to as a tool to help you along the way on your journey”
25:30-27:03	Wants all her kids to be successful and happy; gives credit to her parents and husband. End of interview